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Transportation tax survey yields mixed results

By Mike Branom
Tribune

Most Arizonans agree the state's transportation network is overburdened and underfunded, according to a recent study. But public sentiment is split whether revenue raised by a proposed tax increase would solve traffic problems or further damage an already weak economy.

Penny hike in sales tax eyed for transportation [<http://www.eastvalleytribune.com/story/114405>]

At first glance, the survey contains good news for proponents of a major transportation initiative that will go before voters in November.

Fifty-four percent of those polled said they were likely to approve a statewide one-cent hike in the sales tax, with proceeds financing freeways, trains, buses and other transportation needs across Arizona. An even greater number, 59 percent, believed current funding sources are inadequate to meet the state's needs over the next 30 years.

Meanwhile, only 20 percent expressed satisfaction with transportation systems in the state.

"Arizonans understand that we are at a crossroads," said Doug Pruitt, who heads the group backing the measure. "They see the gridlock in our urban areas and our aging and inadequate rural infrastructure, and they understand the dire need to upgrade our transportation system to keep Arizona's families and economy moving forward."

Pruitt is chairman of a group called Transportation and Infrastructure Moving Arizona's Economy, or TIME Coalition. The group crafted the initiative, which would raise an estimated \$42 billion over 30 years.

But the survey showed citizens are concerned whether the tax increase will have the desired effect.

Respondents almost were evenly split over whether this was a good time to raise taxes, regardless of whether transportation improvements would help the economy. They were also divided about moving forward with the ballot measure or to conduct more studies on state transportation systems.

Because of those worries, by a 19-point margin (57 percent to 38 percent), most respondents recommended the vote be delayed until 2010.

The survey results also contained unfortunate news for Gov. Janet Napolitano, a major supporter of the measure.

When pollsters asked how transportation improvements should be funded, the most popular answer was to raise fees on developers.

Napolitano recently struck a deal with developers in which she agreed not to tax homebuilders in exchange for their support and \$100,000 to kick-start the campaign.

The late March study surveyed 1,224 voters in Maricopa, Pima and Yavapai counties. Its margin of error is 2.9 percentage points.

Results will be presented today to the Maricopa Association of Governments, which funded the study.



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